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Time to reconsider ritual?

The INQUIRER

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The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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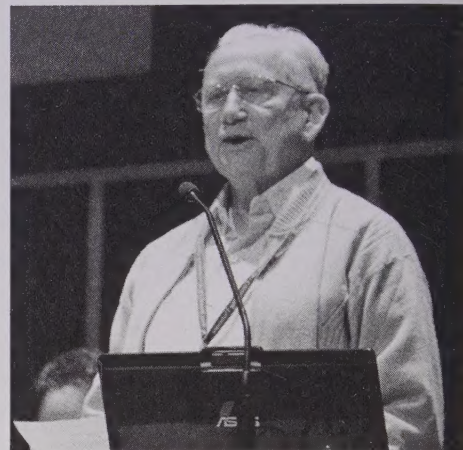
Inquiring Words

At the opening ceremony of the General Assembly meetings, 13 people spoke about how their Unitarian faith, and being part of this faith community, inspires them. What they said will run occasionally in this space.

My current vision of Unitarianism

Fellow seekers, sharers and servers, I am grateful that the GA is providing us with this opportunity to share personal views. 'Without vision the people perish'. No one view will suit all or remain static, but I look forward to not only hearing, but reading the whole series – and to future dialogue.

As a named movement, our tradition begins in the Reformation, with the stress on the authority of the individual



Phil Silk

Photo by Giles Croucher

to interpret scripture, Church teachings and life itself. But it seems to me that the spirit of Unitarianism has been around as long as the human race, as I once told a Conservative Rabbi who was extolling the virtues of having a 4000 year old tradition. I think we should broaden our horizons.

I think the essence of Unitarianism is a liberal approach to life, a recognition that all individuals experience life for themselves, uniquely. By using reason – and emotion – we discover and we develop meaningful living. We also realise how integrated we are into society and nature; we are not really alone. Nor can we be certain of the full truth. Facts, yes; significance, no. 'Unity in diversity' is not just a slogan: it reflects reality as we experience it; it reflects the universe, the human race and the individual. Each of us is an evolving, social interpreter of reality, a unique actor in the drama of life. We are the meaning-makers in theory and practice.

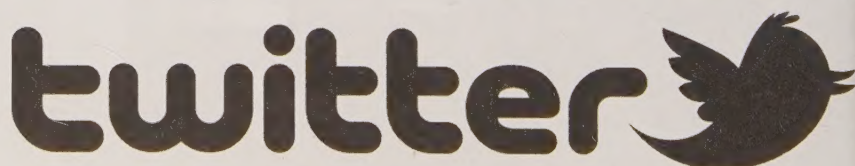
We Unitarians are the living tradition, not a preservation society. Each of us, alone and together, will continue to search, share and serve. What we do will hopefully enrich the quality of life for all humanity and reality, living and non-living.

I would like to see us fulfil our potential as an evolving world religion. Can we, should we, be a religion for one world, open to the insights from all ages and all peoples, working *with* all people and *for* all people?

This is my vision.

What is yours?

– The Rev Phil Silk



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For many faiths, ritual is at the heart of their worship. Young girls receive their first communion at a Catholic mass. Photo by Guglielmo Losio

Worship that engages all the senses

By Alison Patrick

I once heard someone call Unitarians ‘Utilitarians’ – in error, but with unknowing insight – no frills; everything plain, exposed, real and hard; demanding a strong work ethic and a clear head. Not known for ritual, are we? Not really comfortable with it. Not for us the ‘bells and smells’ of high church, chanting in an ancient and foreign language, embellished altar cloths and priestly robes. In general, we are about reason. And, in general, reason equals words. We need to use our brains to understand what is going on and we express that in words. Our services are centred around language – are about listening and comprehending with our intellects – questioning, exploring, challenging new and old ideas. And this is good. And important. And useful in helping us decide how to live in the world.

But even our relatively informal, word-filled, low-church services are rituals – a group gathers at the same time each week, to sit together in a building – for what? A lecture or a discussion – I don’t think so. There are elements of that of course – but it is something more that we share. As well as listening together (which *is* different to listening or reading alone), we hold silence together, we think different thoughts together, and especially, we make and share music together – these are crucially important parts of our service ritual – at least they are for me – because it is sometimes in these times that something indefinable happens that is beyond the intellectual content.

What some faiths have perhaps understood better than Unitarians is that people respond to and find religious meaning using faculties other than the hearing and intellect. Rituals are

designed, or evolve, to appeal to all the senses – of smell, touch, sight, sound, even taste, and of movement. Rituals are physical and emotional more than intellectual. And where language is used it carries ideas beyond factual meaning – words become like a magic spell which does not need to be translated, which like ‘Abracadabra’ does not need to make sense to have its special effect. Because that is what rituals should do – have a special effect – they are a bit of magic and mystery.

This means that rituals can be immensely powerful, and with power is danger. Perhaps that is why we distrust and reject a lot of ritual. The suspension of the intellect where there is no integrity leads to delusion, perpetuation of ignorant and damaging superstitions, unquestioning adherence to questionable values. Once the intellect is suspended there is enormous openness. The vulnerability which allows the magic in can be exploited. Rituals are used to build social cohesion – which means they can be used to exclude and encourage persecution of the excluded, and to exert control over the ‘included’. Some people have come to the Unitarian Church because of their experience of ritual and their discomfort with it.

The sincerely undertaken ritual effects a change, maybe a temporary one, but a change, in the mood and thoughts of a person or a group. This performance, often of a simple, beautiful, probably familiar or repetitive act, engaging the senses, stops our everyday flow of thoughts, makes us focus, and in those moments of focus, gives us a glimmer of... something... of what can be, of hope, of mystery, of the divine. This is the true purpose of a spiritual ritual (interesting

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Are we Unitarians or 'Utilitarians'?

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that one word contains the other). It is a kind of magic. It can be true of secular rituals as well – the sometimes quirky traditions of family and friends, personal acts of reflection – can become holy in a moment. Our human instinct and custom is to mark life changing events and moments with rituals. Whether religious or secular in nature, they are designed to share, honour, and commit to memory the important moment through engaging the senses, to be special, to call on some innate sense of the divine to bless the moment.

I watched 'Lapland' on TV last Christmas – a comedy/drama about an extended British family whose members break with their normal Christmas routines to take the kids to Lapland to see Santa. One character, mother of two small boys, is determined to carry out as much as possible, the usual family Christmas traditions, imposing them on the rest of the family like it or not. In the Lapland hotel room she says to her husband, "We always wrap the kid's presents on Christmas Eve – glass of Baileys, Carols from Kings. I do the paper, you do the Sellotape". In that short sentence we understand that that ritual has been precious to that couple. In those moments of shared activity, anticipating the delight of their children, the spirit of Christmas is alive in them, and they feel the divine beauty of their family. No wonder this mother wanted to cling to the tradition.

Yet in the programme, as in life, rituals, secular and religious do have to develop and change. The time comes when the magic can no longer be created, because circumstances or people have changed. The effect can't be forced. Because rituals must be entered into with total sincerity of purpose. Rituals may have ancient origins but they are of us, we fashion them and like everything we know, they are never forever. They can, and should be questioned, changed, renewed or abandoned – but never carried out cynically or ironically. There is no place for cynicism or irony in ritual – spiritual (or secular actually). I think you *have* to mean it – not in a literal way, but in your heart you have to believe that the ritual is meaningful. Everyone has to give themselves up to it for the magic to work. Because if we don't, then we are just 'playing with the children'*. We should *be* the children. Unless we are prepared to be the children, not analysing, not even thinking, the beautiful ritual is merely habit or routine or entertainment.

Not long after I became a Unitarian I was talking to an acquaintance who I knew was a committed Christian of a more evangelical style. We were talking in a general way about different churches and without knowing at that point that I was one, he said, "Oh the Unitarians, they're *so* intellectual." It wasn't meant as a compliment. He meant that Unitarianism in his eyes excluded many people because it didn't speak beyond the intellect to the emotions and senses. I wasn't sorry he said it and I'm not sorry if we are intellectual compared with some churches. But maybe he had a point – perhaps Unitarians can sometimes be too concerned with the intellect – with reasoning everything out, with words and meaning.

In the index of *Sing Your Faith*, the new purple hymn book, hymns are listed by theme. There is no theme of magic, or mystery, or wonder.

But 'Rainbows' is listed in its own right as a theme and there are six hymns. None of these hymns offers a scientific, rational, factual explanation or description of rainbows. In the

hymns are words of wonder, mystery and magic. We are with Wordsworth: "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky." "My heart leaps up when I behold an optical and meteorological phenomenon caused by the reflection of light on droplets of water" doesn't quite work. And yet we accept the factual explanation. Does this detract from our joy, from the physical and psychological effect, the magic of the rainbow? No of course it doesn't – the two ideas can exist together in our minds quite happily. Similarly there are very rational explanations for the 'magic' of ritual – simple collective action generating a sense of acceptance and belonging, engagement of many of the senses creating maximum sensual and emotional appeal – but does knowing this need to create a barrier to the magic that ritual can release?

I know that despite our healthy distrust and rejection of superstition, our questioning and interpretative approach to the 'supernatural' elements of scripture, Unitarians do magic together. I've experienced it in many gatherings, where doing simple things together sincerely – singing, sharing, lighting a candle, keeping silence, holding hands – we have made a little change in our lives – in the moment, and to take away.

We have to build and maintain trust based on integrity to enable ourselves and others to experience the magic of ritual. We are self-conscious and inhibited individuals. What we feel comfortable with varies tremendously person to person and time to time. To subsume self and intellect and give wholly to a collective act of ritual is to place a great and sacred trust in every other person present – an offering at once both powerful and fragile, precious beyond words.

It won't work every time. But it is important, especially in those clear, hardworking, practical no nonsense times of the year, to make time not just for the words and the work, but in what we do and the way that we do it – to create and allow a little bit more magic in our lives.

*Alison Patrick, member of Shrewsbury Unitarians. Thanks to the Rev Bill Darlison's sermon 'Two Thinks in One' and *Dodie Smith 'I Capture the Castle' for inspiration and ideas.*

Global Chalice Lighting

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists announces the 105th in its monthly series of global chalice lighting readings. Every month, a reading is distributed to Unitarian and Universalist congregations around the world. Each congregation is asked to use the reading for one worship service in the designated month, identifying it as the 'Global Chalice Lighting' for that month and naming the group which submitted it. This Global Chalice Lighting is to be used during May 2012.

We light this chalice to remember that life is born again every day.

**Submitted by la Sociedad Unitaria
Universalista de España
uuespana.googlepages.com/home**

Executive Committee Key Messages

1. Communications

Improving communications at all levels of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement was a significant agenda item following the Resolution at the Annual Meetings calling upon the Executive Committee to develop its policy. Several steps had been already taken at the last EC meeting and presented to the Annual Meeting by the Convenor.

Improving communications is an ongoing two-way process. The Executive Committee agreed a number of actions and will be giving further consideration of other measures it can take. These are not simple matters, particularly as expectations on congregations, districts and the General Assembly have grown and our structures may not be keeping pace. A range of views were expressed on opening the meetings to the public and/or the denominational press and after considerable debate it was agreed that there be no change to the current position. This is, however, very much the start of a journey and we look forward to engaging the wider Unitarian movement to identify what works.

The following additional communications actions were agreed:

- Arranging a face-to-face meeting between District representatives and the Executive Committee in the late autumn. Joan Cook, Rev John Clifford and Derek McAuley have been tasked to progress and ensure the event would prove valuable for both and value for money.
- Encouraging many more Unitarians to sign-up for the GA distribution system "uni-news" enabling direct and timely communication.
- Convenor and Chief Officer to hold an open conference call several times a year.
- Inserts from a "national" perspective written by Executive Committee members and the Chief Officer to be made available for use in congregational newsletters on a monthly basis.
- Ministerial Fellowship to be approached to seek ideas on how engagement with ministers can be developed further.

2. 2020 Congregational Development Programme

Rev Andy Pakula reported that at the Annual Meeting there was excitement and positivity about the potential for new congregational starts of various forms as a result of 2020 congregational development programme. Several people had come forward and offered to help in various ways. It was agreed to appoint Christopher Sande and Rev Daniel Costley to the Programme Board, joining Rev Andy Pakula, Rev Martin Whitell and Yvonne Aburrow. The Inquirer and The Unitarian had agreed to publish regular up-dates on progress and a Facebook Group had been set up which had already generated much helpful discussion. The target date for receipt of the first applications was likely to be mid-2013 and there was much work to be done over the next year, particularly on fund-raising.

3. Becoming a Welcoming Congregation

Nationally the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement is now known as a pioneer of inclusion for LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people); most notably recently for equal marriage. Locally many congregations have been positive; reflecting the liberal religious spirit and the Unitarian commitment to freedom and social justice. However, congregations will be at different stages on the journey of welcome and all can still do more. A resource "Becoming a Welcoming Congregation" has been produced to help

congregations think about the issues involved with suggestions for actions that can be taken locally. This will shortly be finalised and be disseminated and placed on the GA website. Yvonne Aburrow was thanked for her work on this resource.

4. Annual Meeting, Keele 2012

The feedback received on the Annual Meetings has overall been very positive. The programme was generally well-received, issues of importance were seen as being raised at the business sessions and the various speakers were excellent; notably Rev Peter Owen-Jones (John Relly Beard lecture), keynote speaker Paul Parker from the Quakers and Rev Celia Cartright, the Anniversary Service Preacher. The Opening Celebrations were memorable with the personal contributions appreciated. The facilities were good and the Meeting was well organised. The attendance and the budget look likely to be on target. Andrew Mason as Annual Meetings organiser, the Annual Meetings action group and Essex Hall staff and all volunteers, particularly Louise and Zoe Rogers, were thanked for all their hard work.

Plans for the next Annual Meeting in Nottingham, 10 – 13 April 2013 were outlined and work on arrangements has already begun. We know the facilities are good, having been there in 2010, the challenge is now to match the success of 2012!

A consultation pack for congregations, districts, affiliated societies and individuals, prepared by Fulwood Unitarians, will soon be issued on assisted dying following the referral back of the Motion at the Annual Meeting. Look out for publicity in the denominational press and please join in the consultation. This process of consultation may be a useful pattern for the future on controversial matters.

5. Chief Officer's Report

The Chief Officer reported that he had made submissions to the Hodgson Review of the Charity Act 2006 on the specific issue of "excepted" charity status, to which any change would affect most Unitarian and Free Christian churches as members of the General Assembly, and to HMRC on the imposition of VAT on alterations to listed buildings. He had attended a workshop on new Government regulations on transferring money overseas and would be circulating information to congregations.

He had met with the Quakers and Liberal Judaism on tactics on the Government's equal marriage consultation and joined in a consultation meeting at the Home Office as part of the Inter-faith Network. He had participated in the "Cutting Edge Consortium" conference at Conway Hall on 21 April 2012, chairing the main plenary session with an audience of 150 as well as running a workshop.

6. Financial position

The GA's financial position at the end of April 2012 show a small surplus of £6,000 on running costs but with a forecast end of year deficit of £11,000 even after using £25,000 of "restricted" funds. Income is not meeting our budgeted expectations.

7. Honorary Treasurer

Executive Committee member Robert Ince was appointed to act as interim Honorary Treasurer. The search goes on for someone to undertake the position and anyone who may be interested or may be aware of an individual with the required skills should contact the Chief Officer.

8. Re-appointment of Convenor

Rev Martin Whitell was unanimously re-appointed to act as Executive Committee Convenor for a further year. He was thanked for his contribution to leading the Executive Committee during his first year as Convenor.

(Continued on next page)

Confessions of a faint-hearted republican



By Celia Midgley

I do not pretend to be consistent in my view of the royals. As a child I was entranced by pictures of princesses Elizabeth and Margaret and kept cuttings in an album, especially of the glamorous younger sister, stylish with cigarette-holder in hand. I read governess Crawfie's tales in *Sunny Stories* of

the princesses when they were children and was thrilled to be taken to nearby Burnley to glimpse the new queen driven through the streets of the town. Even then, I was shocked at the rumour that a brand new royal lavatory had been installed for that occasion only.

Later the attraction of republicanism was strong and later still feminism and, as the wedding of Charles and Diana approached, I sported a badge in my lapel which proclaimed, 'Don't do it Di!' Prescient?

In more recent years I have accompanied my husband John to a Palace garden party and attended other events involving the royal family.

The fascination with royalty is a curious thing. We seem to need this fairy-tale family to bring colour to our everyday lives.

They are privileged and have no moral superiority, but their presence does seem for many people to brighten and bring joy to lives which are often stressful or sad. And we need ritual and ceremonial in our lives too, to mark the milestones in our communal history. It helps us measure and understand our own individual life stories.

I am not sure how I shall mark the coming Jubilee weekend. In 1953 I

sat cross-legged on a friend's living room floor, staring at a twelve inch television set. At the Silver Jubilee I escaped to the country. I cannot remember the Golden one very clearly. This time, whatever I do, I hope that it will be something joyful, in company with others. For joy and delight, and meaning in our lives, can come through ordinary human interaction and bring transformation.

The Rev Celia Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.



Executive Committee Key Messages

(Continued from previous page)

9. Worship

The Local Leadership Strategic Group reported that, following a request from the Executive Committee, they have initiated work on worship packs, worship materials and worship workshops taking note of the comments about the importance of supporting worship at the Annual Meeting.

10. Millennium Fund

A grant of £250 was made to the National Unitarian Fellowship to assist with the purchase of autocue equipment which will improve the quality of audio visual presentations on the NUF website.

11. Nightingale Centre

The Executive Committee act as trustees of The Nightingale Centre and were pleased to support work currently being undertaken by the Centre's Management Committee with the Charity Commission to update the Order originally agreed in 1964 on formal name, objects and property matters. The Management Committee was thanked for this work to modernise and regularise the legal position.

Other Issues raised at the Executive Committee 24/25 February 2012

Millennium Fund

Billingshurst Chapel in West Sussex was awarded £700 as a contribution towards the cost of a loop system in the chapel. Do you have a good idea to grow your local congregation but don't have the money you need to get it off the ground? There are still grants available to congregations from the Millennium Fund. The criteria are broad but any initiative should either directly or indirectly promote spiritual or numerical growth. At

recent Executive Committee meetings several applications have been approved for funding and the Executive Committee would like to highlight that there is money available for well-thought out schemes.

Grants may be made for professional advisory services but not for maintenance and repair of buildings. They may also be considered for "fittings, furniture and equipment etc. following developmental work", e.g. audio loop systems, and for IT equipment. Developmental ministry arrangements may also be supported with any grants made on a reducing basis year on year (typically over a maximum of three years). Developmental activities can embrace a range of initiatives and/or trials designed to support local growth. Recent grants have been £5000 or less.

For further information on how to apply please contact the Chief Officer

Strategic Group Budgets and Business Plans 2011/12

The establishment of the new strategic groups in October 2011 resulted in an interim General Assembly budget being agreed pending further discussions by the new groups and the EC. Proposals for activities for the remainder of 2011/12 financial year and budgets were considered and additional funding was agreed of £12,500 for the remainder of this year. Plans for next year will be reviewed over coming months given the serious pressures on the finances of the General Assembly, both on income and expenditure.

This report of EC Key Messages is a combination of the ones prepared following the February meeting and those from the May meeting. They were combined because of an editing error, which caused the February messages not to appear.



A shepherd in the Carpathian Mountains. Photo by Constantin Jurcut

Psalm 23 by a shepherd, not a king

By Lyanne Mitchell

I have joined a small community choir on the Isle of Bute, and we have been learning a beautiful arrangement of 'The Lord is my Shepherd'. The text is beloved by Jews and Christians alike. A long tradition ascribes authorship of the psalm to King David, said in the Hebrew Scriptures to have been a field shepherd as a youth. I was brought up singing this psalm, and it is so familiar to me, it had almost lost its meaning. Singing it to a different tune in the choir was like meeting it afresh and made me aware all over again, of the power of the words. Perhaps Unitarians do not identify themselves very easily as sheep (!) but it really is a wonderful affirmation of faith and for living well

The psalm's theme portrays God as the shepherd feeding and caring for his flock (verses 1 and 2). I found a surprising interpretation on the Internet which I would like to share. It suggests that King David is using the shepherd/sheep analogy very specifically and in every single verse of this psalm... more specifically than I had previously thought.

The guidance and protection of the shepherd, from danger and death, is acknowledged in verse 3: *For thou art with me, and thy rod, And staff me comfort still.* These are the implements of a shepherd, which David would have used himself as a boy. *My table thou has furnished* (verse 4). Rather than being a table for humans, as I had thought, may refer to the old oriental shepherding practice of using little raised tables to feed sheep.

My head thou dost with oil anoint (verse 4). Perhaps, like me, you took this as a reference to King David's Royal Coronation, being anointed as King? But he *could* be referring to an ancient form of externally applied medicine for sheep. The shepherd poured it on the head and along the backline of a freshly shorn sheep to control lice or other parasites. In the British Isles, it is called 'pour-on' or 'backliner'. This was also used as a healing oil for sheep wounds. David may have been speaking as a sheep, not a King!

David's background as a shepherd would have made him

aware of how fitting these analogies were for the people of his day. Perhaps he wrote these lines, not only as a powerful expression of his own faith but also as an inspiration, using a familiar terminology, for others to hold a vision of a caring, protective, loving God.

At the risk of being flippant, someone suggested that 'Goodness and Mercy' (verse 6) could be two sheepdogs following behind the flock: *Goodness and Mercy Shall surely follow me.* Psalm 23 is traditionally sung by Jews in Hebrew at many Jewish celebrations. For Christians the image of God as a shepherd evokes connections not only with David but with Jesus, described as 'The Good Shepherd' in the Gospel of John. The phrase about *the valley of the shadow of death* is often taken as an allusion to the eternal life given by Jesus.

I would like to share my 'take' on this text, which was brought to life for posterity by being set to music. 'The Lord' is for me a metaphor for 'Higher Energy' which guides and protects; it constantly reminds me to connect with Nature and to take time out to be still (pastures green/quiet waters); My spirit is nourished by tuning into this energy. It *feeds* and *heals* me on a deep level and encourages me to live with an attitude of gratitude for all that I have; being connected to this Higher Energy gives me courage in dark times and helps me to overcome (or come to terms) with fears about death; and finally, I am guided by goodness and kindness and will try to tune into these qualities all my life. I really like the idea of these two faithful collie sheepdogs, Goodness & Mercy, (I think I'll call the second one 'Kindness') running behind me every day, rounding me up when I get lost in dark hills and guiding me back to the safety and security of 'home'.

We sang this hymn as a prayer, during my recent service at Glasgow Unitarian Church... we remained seated and sang it quietly together. No 66 in 'Hymns for Living' – on that occasion, to the lovely traditional tune, Crimond from the Scottish Psalter, 'The Lord's my Shepherd'.

Lyanne Mitchell is a member of Glasgow Unitarians.

Perhaps it's time to get radical

I went to a PCN conference: Progressive Christianity Network – I have mentioned this before – up at Gladstone's Library in Hawarden which is a kind of PCN Hucklow. The talk was good, the lectures interesting, old friends met as though they had only parted last week rather than last year. New friends were made without effort. I came away with a lot to think about and here I pass my thoughts on to you.

We discussed "Advices & queries" which dates from 1682. This edition was, however, published by the Religious Society of Friends in 2010. Many of you will know and love this booklet. For those who don't know it, it is 'a reminder of the insights of the Society'. It is not a list of procedures and protocols. I shall quote from three to give you an idea of how important this book is.

'4. The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus. How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage? ...'

'18. How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? ...'

'20. Do you give sufficient time to sharing with others in the meeting, both newcomers and long-time members, your understanding of worship, of service and of commitment to the Society's witness? Do you give a right proportion of your money to support Quaker work.'

This booklet makes it clear that being a Friend is something that has to be worked at, thought about, discussed. I wish we had something similar in Unitarianism rather than the all too prevalent – it seems to me – feeling that merely calling oneself Unitarian is enough.

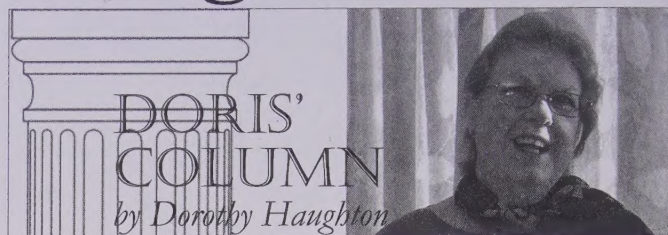
I think just the process of attempting to write such a document would be valuable as it would get people to think about what being a Unitarian means: in the way you live your life, the way you conduct your worship, the way you treat other people.

We heard about the United Reformed Church's Campaign of Radical Welcome. The URC has recognized that it is not enough to say 'we welcome new people' when, all too often, this means 'only if the new people sit quietly, don't interfere and don't try to change anything.' The Campaign of Radical Welcome identifies three groups:

'First – marginalised people of every kind who've got the message that they're unwelcome in church. They may have had a bad personal experience of the Church, they may have been scared off by negative media stories about the Church, or they may just think that church is not for "people like them". Whatever the reason, these marginalised groups have the

impression that they're not welcome. Yet we know that Jesus was particularly loving towards men and women on the edge of society. This campaign aims to show them that.

'Second – the 3 million UK adults, (identified by Tearfund* research),



who are totally disconnected from the Church, but who would come if only someone invited them. This campaign issues that invitation.

'Third – people with a taste for social justice who have stopped believing that actively loving, Jesus-shaped churches exist.'

The Campaign states '...we can only advertise and point people to churches that have opted into the campaign of radical welcome and have been through the process that will allow them to deliver what the campaign promises. We hope that many URC churches will opt-in, but the reality is that not every congregation will make that choice.

'... The campaign is not seeking to promote the URC at the expense of other churches. Far from it. We will soon be offering churches an opportunity to opt into the campaign regardless of denominational affiliation – ultimately we want to make it as easy as possible to convert the campaign into a fully ecumenical movement.'

This looks really exciting. Shouldn't we be saying, "We've heard about this, it sounds great, can we be part of it? How can we help?" (And, why didn't we think of this first?)

At the end of every lecture, we got into small groups to discuss certain aspects of the presentation. The last section was always: "What are the practical outcomes?" Can we, please, promise that whenever two or three Unitarians are gathered together for a discussion of anything whatsoever we shall always finish by deciding what we are going to DO.

Interesting websites for the internet minded:

<http://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/>

<http://www.ftfilms.org.uk/imam.html>

http://www.urc.org.uk/what_we_do/campaign_of_radical_welcome/campaign_of_radical_welcome

Dorothy Haughton is a worship leader in the Midlands.



Programme Director sought

Simple Gifts Social Action Project based at Mansford St. Mission, Bethnal Green, London E2 seeks a HALF TIME PROGRAMME DIRECTOR to launch and manage the Social Action projects under the joint auspices of London District & Provincial Assembly & The Chalice Foundation Trustees.

Salary at General Assembly scale pro rata

Apply to Rev. David Usher davidusher@ldpa.org.uk by 30 June 2012

Self-reliance is a modern delusion

By Danny Crosby

Every Sunday morning, as I look up at the ceiling at Dunham Road Church, I feel like I am sailing in a great ship. Some Sundays I truly feel like I am a member of the fellowship of the spirit; some days I do feel like I am getting a taste of heaven. I have been well fed in my time as minister to the congregations of Altrincham and Urmston.

I love the following Japanese folk tale about heaven and hell:

A woman who had worked all her life to bring about good was granted one wish: "Before I die let me visit both hell and heaven." Her wish was granted.

She was whisked off to a great banquetting hall. The tables were piled high with delicious food and drink. Around the tables sat miserable, starving people as wretched as could be. "Why are they like this?" she asked the angel who accompanied her.

"Look at their arms," the angel replied.

She looked and saw that attached to the people's arms were long chopsticks secured above the elbow. Unable to bend their elbows, the people aimed the chopsticks at the food, missed every time and sat hungry, frustrated and miserable. "Indeed this is hell! Take me away from here!"

She was then whisked off to heaven. Again she found herself in a great banquetting hall with tables piled high. Around the tables sat people laughing, contented, joyful. "No chopsticks I suppose," she said.

"Oh yes there are. Look – just as in hell they are long and attached above the elbow but look... here people have learnt to feed one another."

"Heaven and Hell" appear exactly the same and yet they are experienced oh so differently. In Hell all go hungry because everyone tries to feed themselves only, they are purely self reliant. And yet in heaven they attempt to feed one another and are therefore fed in abundance. To me this is as much about the relationships as the food going into one another's mouths. I believe that we all possess an innate need to serve one another. If we do not feed this part of ourselves a beautiful part of our natural humanity withers away and dies off. By not serving one another we starve our souls.

In Mark (Ch 8 vs 1-9) Jesus feeds a crowd of people with whom he had spent three days. He had not invited them to join him and therefore was certainly not obliged to feed them. I am sure that the crowd were not expecting to be fed by the meagre amount that the disciples brought. But what happens? Well Jesus recognises the crowd's hunger and the fact that they have travelled a great distance to be with him, he expresses compassion for all of them. He asks the crowd to sit down and to share a meal with him. He then instructs the disciples to serve the people personally. The crowd eat and are filled. This is not because their bodies were filled, but because a deeper hunger was met.

What occurs is a true human encounter between the disciples and the crowd. The people are served face to face and are therefore truly loved and cared for. They were not just physically fed they were personally served and therefore their hu-



Danny Crosby

manity recognised. Each individual's hunger mattered. The key phrase in the whole account are the words "They ate and were filled".

I am someone who enjoys their food and most people know this. Wherever I go people feed me and I do find it hard to say no to them. I find it hard to say no to anybody actually. It is just the way I am, I suppose. I am though trying to say 'no' at the moment. I have to – otherwise I am going to burst. That said, I know that when you go into someone's home the offering of hospitality is so important.

To refuse hospitality is an insult, so yes it is difficult to say no. This is hard when visiting people as a minister. A colleague of mine told me that I have to do it though. She said that when she first entered ministry she couldn't say no to anyone's hospitality and as a result put on two stones in

weight within the first 12 months. I need to find ways to accept hospitality without necessarily always eating the food. I need to allow the people I am here to serve and love to love and serve me also.

I think that one of the greatest delusions of the modern era is the myth of self reliance, this idea that as individuals we have all that we need and that we do not need one another. I have no desire whatsoever to sail my ship alone. I want, I need others. I need true fellowship. I have needed it the last few days as have many friends as we have come to terms with the horrific death of one of our fellows. He died in dreadful circumstances to an illness that I found merciful release from many years ago. I could not have done this alone I needed the help of a fellowship that is truly of the spirit.

Over the last while I have witnessed true spirituality. I have seen people truly in relationship with one another. We do care; to not care, to care less, is to experience inhumanity actually. It is to become trapped inside oneself. These last few days I have witnessed people in excruciating personal agony express deep concern for one another. They have shared their love and have shared their pain; they have fed one another and they have drunk from one another's cup; they have truly served one another and in doing so have experienced something of heaven.

We all thirst and hunger – even in our seemingly materially abundant lives. We cannot feed this hunger in isolation, in self reliance. It is only fed in that relationship that occurs as we feed one another. We all hunger for purpose and meaning. As Viktor Frankl pointed out we are driven by a will to find meaning and purpose.

I would go further and suggest that we are also driven by a will to find true companionship in our increasingly isolated and isolating culture. We need to serve one another, or our souls will starve. I have discovered and I keep on discovering that our deepest pangs are not satisfied by the food that is laid on the table but in the relationship that occurs as we feed one another and as we drink from one another's cup.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and at Urmston.

Letters to the Editor

Spread the word how growth happened

To the Editor:

When comparing the total Quota Membership figures for 2010 - 3672, and for 2011 - 3551 we find that there has been a total reduction of 121. This reduction resulted from 20 congregations showing an increase, 53 showing a decrease, and 90 showing no change. Of the 20 congregations that showed an increase in membership, 3 increased by 1, 7 by 2, 1 by 3, 1 by 4, 2 by 5, 2 by 6, 1 by 7, 2 by 8, and 1 by 10. This gives a total new membership of at least 79.

These congregations must know who they are. Please can they tell the denomination what they did to achieve their increase in membership? Further, please can they encourage their new members to tell us how they found Unitarianism and what was so special for them that convinced them to join and stay?

This information must be seen as being vital when designing, evaluating and assessing publicity material.

Peter Whitham

Stockton

Earth Spirit Network never used pseudonyms

To the Editor:

I enjoyed Susie Ince's *Inquirer* coverage of the GA Earth Spirit meeting. However I feel that I must correct one or two points regarding the origin of the Network. I started it in 1990 with long-range help from Lesley Phillips and Linda Pinti of the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUP), and I still have most of their cassettes featuring speakers at CUUPs GAs including Starhawk, Selma Fox, Riane Eisler and a chants workshop led by Margot Adler. We were *never* a Secret Society. A few Unitarians did react negatively to the 'P' word and so in order to provide a degree of privacy for those who chose to write to the Network journal (which was available to all interested persons) I used only their first names - no pseudonyms! From the start, we held open meetings at GAs and spoke to all interested Unitarian groups wishing to know more. The nearest we ever got to Gardnerian Wicca was our

earliest Hucklow weekend, when High Priestess, Patricia Crowther led us in an excellent ritual event - with everyone fully clothed throughout. Otherwise we created our own worthwhile, if unsensational, Wicca-Druid flavoured worship forms.

I suspect that Susie may have reported humorous comments by Tony McNeile, but unfortunately cold print can make them seem to be factual statements. If anyone wants accurate background on the origins of the Earth Spirit Network, I believe that two academic papers have been produced on the subject; one by the Rev Jo Lane (late of Richmond & Putney) and another by Jo Rogers, an early, very active supporter of my efforts. Incidentally, I wonder how many other Unitarian groups have earned such recognition? Of course, Earth Spirit now does its own thing and quite rightly so. But I do believe that it is necessary to keep the historic record straight.

The Rev Peter J Roberts

Worthing

Bright Lights seek Uni-Songs

To the Editor:

Our Bright Lights group in Bristol is planning to collect a number of songs to use at our meetings.

Sadly I cannot find my copy of Trevor Jones "Uni-Songs" [hope I got that right] which will be very useful. It has been out of print now for several years. If anyone has a copy they could lend/give etc that would be great.

We do have a number of song books - but any ideas of resources you have found useful would be most welcome.

With many thanks,

Lindy Latham

Bristol

Email: lindy@belindalatham.co.uk

Time to settle the question of assisted suicide

To the Editor:

From the recent *Inquirer* coverage it appears that the General Assembly is suffering from the 'I used to think I was indecisive but now I'm not so sure' syndrome. Everybody appears to know that something should be done to regularise the legal position of assisted suicides. However they cannot make

a decision about what should be done. Why?

Britain has now reached a state of spending a great deal of NHS cash providing the best possible quality of life for people who desperately want to die, however the law does not permit suicide and they have to suffer interminably.

We feel for these people and keep talking about what should be done but do nothing except talk.

Members of the GA think it knows what should be done but are unable to do it because the decision is not theirs to make.

The decision we all need to make is to apply pressure on the Government to take the issue seriously and introduce a motion so that the question can be addressed fully.

John Smith Wilkinson

Stonehouse, Gloucestershire

Restructuring often not what it seems

To the Editor:

Marion Baker (*Letters, Inquirer* 7794) wonders why restructurings in organisations never seem to achieve their stated purpose.

This is because their real purpose is often nothing to do with efficiency, economy and so forth. Their real purpose is to enable the dismissal of trouble-makers on the staff. These are people who, while good at their job - often, indeed, excellent at it - either refuse to let their line manager take the credit for their work, fail to show any interest in his or her career path, believe that they work for the organisation rather than their line manager or in some other way place honesty above loyalty.

Mike Killingworth

London

The *Inquirer* has a
new web site!

See:

www.Inquirer.org.uk

Joan Wylie, Rose Queen to GA Council

By Peter Godfrey

Joan Wylie, who died on 23 April, 2012, will be remembered with gratitude and affection by Unitarians all over the British Isles. Joan was a lifelong Unitarian who served the movement in a great many ways.

Joan was christened at Rochdale Unitarian Church where her father and paternal grandmother were members. When the family moved to Manchester in 1926 Joan was soon involved with Brookfield Church and is particularly remembered for her hard work there in many spheres – as a Rose Queen, 56 years in the choir and 20 years as a Sunday School teacher.

In 1945 Joan married Leonard Cooke who became a stalwart church worker. Their son Howard was born in 1949. Leonard died in 1972.

Joan trained as a teacher in 1960 and taught at schools and in further education in Manchester until 1981. Joan was an Honorary Member of the Manchester District Association of Unitarian Churches and was its representative for six years on the General Assembly Council. Joan was also a committee member of the National Unitarian Fellowship.

Joan was President of the National Lay Preachers Association in 1986. She took the lay preachers' courses and later attended Unitarian College, Manchester, as a lay student, and obtained the University Certificate in Theology in 1985. According to former Principal, the Rev Dr Leonard Smith, Joan was the first and maybe the only lay student of any denomination to do this. Dr Smith, also said 'Joan and Harry regularly attended the Past and Present Students Meeting and End of Session Proceedings and during my principalship they were amongst the most loyal and encouraging of supporters.'

All the students – now ministers – remember Joan with gratitude and great affection. As one of them said, 'Joan was a mine of information, always jolly and with a great sense of humour. She was a bit of a mum to me in some ways – a special lady who was an important part of my life in my



formative years as a minister'. Joan was very understanding of ministers. One remembers how from time to time Joan sent to her items of clothing from the very nice charity shop where she worked in Christchurch.

Joan was also a great supporter of the Women's League, serving as national President in 1991/2 and the League's representative on the Women's Advisory Council of the United Nations Association.

Joan's involvement as a Lay Preacher led to her meeting and then marrying Harry Wylie of Glasgow Unitarian Church. On moving to

Glasgow, Joan was soon involved with Unitarian activities in Scotland, especially with the Women's League and attending Scottish Unitarian Association events.

In 1990 Joan and Harry moved to Highcliffe, Dorset, and attended, when possible, the Bournemouth and then Southampton churches and Southern Unitarian Association meetings. Joan soon became active in the Highcliffe Community Association (working in its 50/50 shop), the Business and Professional Women's Association and the Women's League Western District of which she was President in 1994/5.

Both *Faith and Freedom* and the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund benefitted considerably from Joan and Harry's generous and encouraging support over many years.

Thanks for Joan's full and loving life, for her devoted Unitarianism and her loyal friendship were expressed at her funeral service in Bournemouth.

A service to celebrate Joan's life is planned for 2pm on 22 June in the Chapel at Luther King House, Brighton Grove Manchester M14 5JP. No flowers. Donations to Send-a-Child to Hucklow c/o the Rev Chris Goacher, 19 Demontfort Road, Hinckley, Leics. LE10 1LQ. Or see the web site: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/sach/index.htm

The Rev Peter Godfrey is a retired Unitarian minister.

British suicide law doesn't make sense

By Celia Cartwright

In the late 1980's our beloved red setter, Rosie, began behaving strangely and became increasingly confused. Eventually she was often incontinent and her deafness didn't help. I think it was Christmas 1990 or '91 when things came to a head. As usual we had gone to my parents but Jodie was so distressed I took her home on Boxing Day. A couple of days later the vet's verdict was in. She had dementia and the only kind thing to do was to put her to sleep. When the children came home a couple of days later there was much sadness in our house. We kept Rosie for a week and lavished love and attention on her. Saving images and the feel of her in our hearts and minds. We all went with her to the vet and stayed with her till she was at peace.

In the late 1990's my dad was diagnosed with dementia and during the following few years he became increasingly confused and depressed and he developed strange habits. By 2000 he could no longer figure out how to do even simple

tasks. The man of great intellect, purpose and vision was gone. In his place was an increasingly difficult person who talked incessantly, who followed his elderly wife round and round giving her little peace – and he was becoming doubly incontinent. Social services were few and it seemed that as we were 'coping' that was fine. Mum and I took antidepressants and kept going with my daughter's help. In 2005 during the Christmas break a duty Community Psychiatric nurse came at my insistence to see him. Appalled, she found a place for him in a well run nursing home. Eighteen months later he died in hospital after his multi-infarct dementia put him in a coma. Only then was palliative care deemed the right thing. Now here's the thing I don't understand: If I had allowed my dog to suffer the way my dad suffered, I would have been guilty in law of cruelty. However, had I helped my dad as I helped my dog I would have been guilty in law of at least manslaughter. It doesn't make sense at all.

Celia Cartwright is minister at Kendal.

Unitarian social networks continue to grow

The Inquirer facebook page allows anyone to feed back about issues. Some congregations have pages. **Yvonne Aburrow** lists the national Unitarian pages

UK Unitarians This is an open group, where we hope to provide an opportunity for Unitarians and other interested people anywhere in the UK or Ireland to connect. The aim is to find each other, find communities if we are seeking them, and talk about how to help people find meaning in their lives without the rigidity of traditional religion.

Unitarians This is a closed group, for Unitarians only, where we can discuss more controversial topics of interest to existing members, and offer each other support and fellowship.

Eclectic Unitarians This is a group for Unitarians who do not identify with any particular spiritual tradition other than Unitarianism, and hope to find inspiration and meaning from various spiritual traditions, literature, poetry and science.

Humanist Unitarians This is a group for Unitarians who don't believe there is a supernatural entity that controls events in our lives. The group is for exploration of ways of being Unitarian religious humanists.

Rainbow Unitarians This is a group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and intersex Unitarians to find fellowship, share ideas and resources, and discuss queer spirituality and theology. It is the online version of Rainbow Unitarians, whose website can be found at www.unitarian.org.uk/rainbow/

Unitarian Earth Spirit Network This is a group for Unitarians who revere the totality of the divine reality of nature being revealed to us through the infinite multiplicity of forms and

forces; seek to evolve creative ways of worship for body, mind and spirit; affirm a Pagan spiritual perspective as being fully compatible with the human quest for self-knowledge and ultimate meaning; wish to encourage practical action on social issues which is directly related to a nature-centred faith and philosophy. The UESN website can be found at www.ukunitarians.org.uk/earthspirit/

Liberal and inclusive religions A group for people from religious groups that welcome LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, treat genders equally and respect other religions, regarding their mythologies as valid perspectives on the great mystery of the universe. Including, but not limited to, Pagans, Quakers, Unitarians, liberal Christians, liberal Jews, and anyone else who thinks religions being co-operative and inclusive is a good thing.

BUYAN (British Unitarian Young Adult Network) This is a group for UK Unitarians between the ages of 18 and 35.

2020 Unitarian Congregational Development Fund This group is for sharing information and discussion about the British Unitarian 2020 Congregational Development Fund, to get everyone involved in thinking and planning for the 2020 initiative.

Yvonne Aburrow is editor of The Unitarian.



Following the Oldham chapel's appeal on behalf of Taha Ghasemi for the donation of a laptop computer, Dawn and Roy Buckle, both members of Dukinfield (Unitarian) Old Chapel have very generously donated their spare laptop to Taha. Taha was very pleased to receive this much-wanted gift as you can see. Many thanks to Dawn and Roy. Please follow this link: <http://youtu.be/B3364JYBrTQ> for a brief video of Taha saying thank you.

Financial Update

We are extremely grateful to all who have so far donated to this campaign. Chapel treasurer, Marian Nuttall gave us the following breakdown: Money raised to date: £3,734 money spent: £4, 204. Situation: Ongoing...

— Bob Pounder

Ministry Inquiry Days

**Want to know more about training as
a Unitarian &
Free Christian minister or lay pastor/
leader
and about working with our
congregations?**

This summer the Ministry Strategy Group is again holding Inquiry Days for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

London, Essex Church, Kensington:

Saturday 16th June

Manchester, Luther King House:

Thursday 9th August

Times for both venues: 11am for 11.30 start
— 3.30pm finish

Booking deadlines: 6th June for London
and 3rd August for Manchester.

Advance booking is essential

To book, please contact Mary-Jean Hennis at
Unitarian General Assembly,
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY
Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk